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The Christian Faces Communism

THE CHRISTIAN FACES COMMUNISM
GILBERT H. AND MARTHA SHERMAN BAKER
AN ORIGINAL PROGRAM FOR ADULT GROUPS
PRICE 25 CENTS

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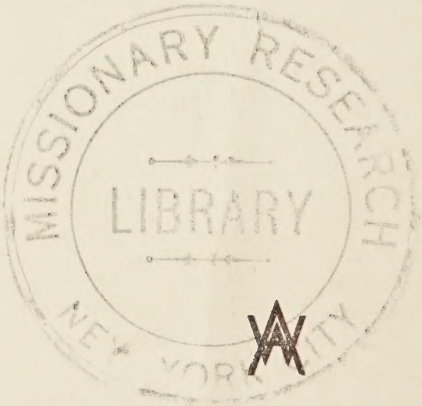

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To the Leader

This program on communism and Christianity may be presented:

As a dialogue between the speaker and a person asking the questions.

By a speaker and a panel asking questions.

With the speaker questioned by members of the group or audience, numbered questions having been distributed among them, or

It may be read as a statement of information.

To present the subject, the leader will introduce the panel or member, and then the guest speaker as a missionary who has studied communism.

The text is cast in question and answer form. In rehearsing the selected method of presentation, it is suggested that the panel members and questioners follow their natural inclination to interrupt the speaker's long statements with comments or questions. This will assure the presentation's being more of a conversational nature than of a series of speeches.

The text is of such length that presentation in two parts is advised. The break may be made on page 18, and the second half given at another meeting.

It will help the group to follow the discussion better if the headings in the text are put on the blackboard as they are stated, or on cards visible to all.

The Christian Faces Communism

SPEAKER. We are going to discuss a tremendously big question today, Communism and Christianity. Let's begin by asking each one here what mental picture is brought before him by those words. What impressions come to the surface when you hear those two words together?

MEMBERS. A Christian crusade against communism? Why can't the Churches appeal to young people as strongly as the communists do? . . . . . The world would get along happily if it weren't for those communists. . . . . What should the Church do about subversive elements? . . . . . Do we need fewer or more investigations? . . . . . Communism is a wonderful idea of sharing the wealth, but it's got into the wrong hands. . . . . *Ask your group for more suggestions.*

SPEAKER. Well, so much for first impressions. It's clearly something that affects us all. But suppose we go to the beginning and ask now, *What is communism?*

MEMBER. Yes, that is important, and the first question I would ask is this: *Is communism necessarily anti-Christian?*

Is All Communism Anti-Christian?

SPEAKER. No. There have been attempts at a kind of communist society within the Church, beginning from the experiment in Jerusalem, recorded in Acts 2:44 and 4:32. The findings of the 1948 Lambeth Conference made this point, and held that the kind of society in which people hold property in common, as, for instance, in a monastic order, may well be an expression of Christian conviction.

MEMBER. I suppose communism in the sense of common ownership of property has been practiced by many primitive peoples. Wasn't that the case with many Indian tribes in this country? I have read that the German tribes conquered by Julius Caesar had a system of common ownership, and there is the idea of community of goods in Plato, in a much more advanced society.

MEMBER. So perhaps we should say there is a difference between Marxian communism and other kinds.

SPEAKER. That's right. The difference between Marxian communism and other kinds of communism and socialism is that Marx was a militant atheist who believed that revolution was inevitable, but at the same time, he urged an active and ruthless struggle so that the proletariat might achieve its destined victory. Democratic socialism on the other hand believes in gradual and constitutional social change.

MEMBER. Wait a minute. What does Marx mean by *proletariat* and *struggle* and *victory?* We would like to have a very simple outline of what Marx's teaching is. Then we may know more clearly what the Church has to say about it.

SPEAKER. Marx had a complicated mind, so a simple analysis is not easy; but here is a start:

Marx learned a great deal from the dialectic of the German philosopher Hegel, by which is meant the method of change through discussion. Somebody puts forward a proposition, the *thesis*. Someone else says just the opposite, the *antithesis*. Finally, a new position is reached, the *synthesis,* and life goes forward.

Marx then adopted a materialist philosophy, the belief that the only real things are material, and attached his dialectic to that, so that thesis, antithesis, and synthesis were seen only in economic terms. The power of producing goods was to him the most important thing in life, and that power in Marx's day was nineteenth century capitalism, controlled by a class of employers who both owned and directed industry. That was the thesis. Against this was the proletarian class of workers who must inevitably struggle and take possession of the means of production, and that is the antithesis. Out of the struggle between these two elements there emerges the dictatorship of the proletariat, and this is the bearer of the classless society, which is the synthesis.

Marx followed a German rationalist called Feuerbach in rejecting all religion just as he rejected philosophic idealism. That is to say Marx accepted Hegel's dialectical method, but rejected his belief that ideas are the ultimate things in life. Marx was always for action and held that a society could only be understood in terms of taking part in its material life. He saw religion as the weapon of the ruling classes to keep the people docile in the face of terrible working conditions. Other people were thinking the same thing, and it was the Anglican clergyman, Charles Kingsley,

who first used the expression that religion can be the "opium of the people."

Although Marx claimed to be coldly scientific in his communist analysis of society, he was by no means only a recluse in the British Museum. He took an active part in the European revolutions of 1848, when the *Communist Manifesto* was published, and again in the founding of the earliest international revolutionary movement known as the First Internationale in 1864. This collapsed after the excesses of the French Commune in 1870. The Second Internationale, founded in 1889, included more socialists than communists and was the forerunner of modern social democracy. The Third Internationale was strictly communist and was the forebear of the present communist party. As a revolutionary he did appeal in fact to moral standards, denouncing tyranny and injustice, calling forth heroism and self-sacrifice. Theoretically, moral standards are discarded along with religion but in practice communists have retained and relied upon them, although there are exceptions to this rule. For this reason many persons think that communism has inherited a strand of Judaic righteousness from its founder, who was a baptized Jew, and that it bears the marks not only of the three ideological currents of the nineteenth century, German philosophy, English political economy, and the doctrines of the French socialism, but also the current of Christian thought which has so deeply penetrated western society.

MEMBER. Thank you. I think I see what you mean. But I feel there must be something more to communism than those theories. Why does it have such a hold on so many people?

Why is Marxism Attractive?

SPEAKER. There are several answers to that. Here are some. Perhaps you can suggest others.

1. Whether we like it or not, a good many of Marx's predictions did in fact come to pass.

He described and noted the trade cycle, the succession of booms and slumps which he attributed to the internal contradictions of capitalism. Manufacturers are interested in high prices and low wages, so that they can cover the cost of production and make a profit. But it is ultimately the workers who buy the finished products, and if their wages are not enough to buy the goods there is a glut on the market; prices fall and there is a depression. We all know this has happened in both Europe and in America.

Marx noted that capitalist countries tried to avoid this state of affairs by developing overseas markets where they could send their surplus goods, or by preparing for war. Broadly speaking Britain and France relied on their imperial markets. Germany prepared for war. America seems to have beaten the trade cycle for the moment, but Marxists would say that this is only because since the 1930's there has been a war economy.

Marx believed that a workers' revolution was imminent and inevitable. It happened in Russia, and now it has happened in China.

2. Communism appeals to the altruistic nature of youth, and to its love of adventure. During the Japanese war, young Chinese flocked to the Chinese communist cave city of Yenan, in response to a positive appeal to resist aggression and rebuild the country; they accepted cheerfully the hardships of the journey and the rough life of the partisans. The same spirit

could be seen in resistance groups in Yugoslavia and other German-occupied parts of Europe. With the victory of the communist regime in China, the accent also has been heavily on youth with strong appeals to its loyalty.

3. Communism appeals to man's sense of social justice. Marx's assertion that philosophers have explained society, and that it is now our task to change it, is a promise of action which appeals to all who long to do something about the tremendous discrepancies between rich and poor.

4. Communism has appealed to people of all races and colors on a basis of equality. This has made a specially strong impression in Asia, and to some extent in Africa. At the big international communist conferences there is no distinction of race or color. This cannot always be said of Christian assemblies.

5. Communism also appeals to the self-interest of workers and peasants in different lands. Factory life is hard and monotonous even in good conditions. Communism promises the worker more power. The small farmer in China is land hungry and in debt. Communism promises land redistribution. Whether or not these promises are fulfilled under a communist regime is quite a different question. But there is no doubt about the strength of the appeal.

What do Christians say about Marxism?

MEMBER. Now we have seen something of what communism is and why it appeals. But what about the Christian answer to all this?

SPEAKER. I think we should beware of comparing two things that are not on the same plane. Com-

munism is a political and economic doctrine and system; as we shall see, it has some religious aspects, but it is essentially man-centered. Christianity is God-centered, and speaks from the eternal in a different dimension. It includes the dimension of politics and economics in which communism speaks, but it goes beyond them. Christianity has a wider perspective. It started long before communism; it will continue long after it.

MEMBER. You don't mean that Christianity has nothing to say about communism?

SPEAKER. O, no, indeed. But I think it is important for Christians not to reduce their sights and to imagine that communism which is a man-made movement is on the same scale as God's plan for the whole universe, or even as His Church as it exists today. Christians must start from the assumptions of their faith just as communists do from theirs. It is hopeless to get bogged down figuring out Christian answers to the communist peace offensive for example, just as it is probably unfruitful to get involved in an argument about the Christian answer to the waterfront racket. There is an answer both to communism and to racketeering, but you must begin at the beginning with the essential Christian faith which you find in the New Testament and in the Creeds.

MEMBER. That's fair enough. Now I am going to ask you what are the Christian teachings and practice about these social questions, and what is their attraction?

SPEAKER. This has been the subject of many books! But isn't the answer briefly something like this:

We believe in God who has created the material

world and its resources for the use of man; we also believe that God is good and just and demands that these good things shall be shared among all His children.

Our belief that God entered human society in Jesus Christ means that our faith is intensely concerned with this life and its political and economic issues, as well as with the life eternal.

Jesus recognized the strong pull of economic motives. *How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the Kingdom of God.* But He did not think, as the communist does, that the economic motive is necessarily the controlling factor. He saw more deeply into human motives, and knew that sin could not be cured by political revolution. It could only be forgiven, and this forgiveness of God was demonstrated completely by the Cross. The Christian is assured through the Resurrection of new life and forgiveness after defeat. The communist society knows no forgiveness after failure, only liquidation.

The Christian believes that the Holy Spirit has guided the Church through the long course of history, and that the Church has injected, for all its failures, a leaven of righteousness, gentleness, and love into human society. He believes, too, that all forms of human society are ultimately judged by the standards of Jesus Christ.

MEMBER. Yes, I think we can see how deeply the Christian faith has penetrated into Western society, but it is this same society in which communism has appeared. How is communism related to the Christian environment in which it grew?

SPEAKER. Communism is related to the story of Christianity in Western Europe. It is in a way an off-

shoot from a whole body of Christian thinking and practice. From earliest times the Church had a real concern for social and economic justice. In the Middle Ages it tried to regulate prices and forbade usury. It did not stem the tide of capitalism, nor avert the breakdown of feudal society. Indeed it was a Christian priest, John Ball, who led the Peasants' Revolt in fourteenth century England, which spelled the end of feudalism. Christians played an active part in the English revolution of the seventeenth century. There were groups of levellers and near-communists at this time, and there were a number of experiments in community living in the early days of the American settlements. Christians were pioneers of humanitarian movements in the nineteenth century, against the slave trade and in favor of factory legislation. Methodist preachers became trade union leaders. Kingsley and Maurice were preaching Christian socialism in England before Marx's *Manifesto* was widely known. The Roman Catholic trade union movement and the development of Center Parties in Europe are also examples of strong Christian influences, which are still behind the social democratic forms of government, in Western Europe today. We should not forget this strand of influence when we think of the rapid rise of communism.

MEMBER. But if Christians were taking such a lead in social affairs, how was it that communism arose at all?

SPEAKER. It was only a small minority of Christians who were alive to these matters. The great mass of church people in the nineteenth century did not really understand or care about social questions. You see, Christian practice did not correspond to Christian

theory. This failure left a vacuum in which communism arose.

MEMBER. I know that communists talk of the unity of theory and practice, but do communist theory and practice agree? What is the difference between the theory as described by Marx and Engels, and the practice in Russia?

Marxist Theory and Russian Practice

SPEAKER. Communism has certainly changed. Of course, it is only natural and according to its own dialectic that it should. You will have to decide whether it has changed completely.

MEMBER. Well, I suppose the biggest change was that the revolution came first in Russia, and not in Germany, as Marx expected.

SPEAKER. Yes, that was a very big change. Instead of coming in a highly industrialized country, the revolution came in Russia which was a vast empire of peasants and one stage removed from feudal serfdom, though there were also some new and not too well-organized industries. There was, of course, a well-known revolutionary intelligentsia, followers of Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Turgenev, and others. Remember there is a Christian influence here, too. But the intelligentsia was regarded as too unpractical, and the empire seemed too unwieldy for anything to come of this movement.

MEMBER. What then do you think are the lessons learned from the Russian Revolution? How was Lenin different from Marx?

SPEAKER. I think the basis of Lenin's success was his

conception of party solidarity and discipline. He saw that a group of determined and ruthless men can take advantage of a confused situation to gain power, even if they do not have popular support. That is why the Russians have always kept such a tight hold upon international communism, and why they insist on all communists accepting the party line every time it changes.

MEMBER. Do you think that communism has changed from an international movement for a form of Russian imperialism?

Russian Communism Between the Wars

SPEAKER. It has certainly taken that direction. Trotsky wanted to launch a worldwide revolution, but Stalin saw the importance of consolidating the communist regime in Russia, first.

MEMBER. Why do you think world revolution was abandoned?

SPEAKER. I think the changing nature of the capitalist world may have had something to do with the changes in communism. Marx had envisaged an increasing depression among the workers; his doctrine of increasing misery implied that working conditions would get progressively worse until the workers of the world would unite in revolution. But actually conditions of labor have improved, and so have real wages through the enormous development of industry in Europe and America, and the growth of democratic trade unions. Stalin felt that Russia's first need was to compete with this growing industrialism. By means of two five-year plans, Russian industry was developed on a socialized basis, and the collective farms estab-

lished at the cost of bitter opposition and great loss of human and animal life. At the same time the Communist Party strengthened its iron grip on the whole vast territory. By means of purges, dramatic trials, the secret police, and all the apparatus of dictatorship, Stalin and his *Politbureau* established themselves in an impregnable position.

MEMBER. Is this what Marx called the dictatorship of the proletariat? Or is it just plain dictatorship like that of Hitler?

SPEAKER. It does not seem to be based only on the power of one man, for the Russian people still seem to be behind their government. Russia confounded the military experts by turning back the Nazi German invasion.

MEMBER. Yes, the Russians seemed to have had a more popular and co-operative government then. We never agreed with their ideology, but we recognized that we could not have defeated Germany without the Russian front, and they admitted, too, that they could not have been successful without our aid.

MEMBER. But why have the Russians turned so mean since World War II?

SPEAKER. It wasn't just stomach ulcers or bad temper on the part of their diplomats, though envy may have something to do with it. Communism, with its cynical view of human motives, has taught the Russians to be wary in dealing with the West; and they could claim that experience has taught them caution. Support given by Western allies to the White Russians in the Revolution, the suppression of communist parties, the rise of Facism and Nazism which had the blessing of

so many capitalists, all these things, coupled with America's possession of the atom bomb, were calculated to breed suspicion. Russia's strong position at the end of World War II had to be consolidated, according to the Kremlin, by tough diplomacy. But notice that, although they are as difficult as they can be, the Russians do not seem to want to leave the United Nations. They have left some gaps in the curtain. If, as we hope, there is a change to a more co-operative attitude, it will be strictly because of self-interest on the part of the communists; but that is no reason for not welcoming any easing of tension, so that we may redeem the time by reform and reconstruction in our own society, and continue the effort to bring about peace. In the same way it was not wrong to welcome Russian resistance to Germany in 1941.

MEMBER. Well, that brings us almost up to date on Russia. But I would like to ask about the Church in that country. Is it truly Christian? And is it in any sense a Christian answer to communism?

The Christian Church in Russia

SPEAKER. It certainly cannot be ignored as part of the universal Church's answer to communism. The Orthodox Church was so closely bound up with the Czarist State that it was naturally the object of bitter attacks in the 1917 revolution. The Church suffered very great hardships and persecution; the influence of godless communism and the anti-God movement seem to have driven the Church almost underground; but the war against Germany brought out a latent devotion in the people. Churches are crowded again. The Archbishop of York visited Russia during World War II, and was given a very warm reception by

Russian Christians. The Moscow Patriarchate was publicly restored, and training for the ministry sanctioned. The Church today is, of course, strictly under the eye of the government, and its pronouncements are usually in accord with the official policy. Co-operation with other communions in the West is very difficult. But the worship and the witness of the Church go on. There also is evidence that other communions, like the Baptist, still have their adherents in Russia, and that the Russian Bible is still being circulated.

MEMBER. Thank you. I think we should certainly not forget to pray for our fellow Christians in Russia. But I wonder whether communism is different in other countries where it has been established. What can Christians learn from the developments in China and Eastern Europe?

Communism in Other Countries: China

SPEAKER. We know a good deal about how communism gained control in China, for many of our Church's missionaries were there and saw it coming.

MEMBER. Yes, but don't you think that many of them were fooled in the early days of communism by thinking that the Reds were merely agrarian reformers?

SPEAKER. I think that is simply a matter of terms and stages of development. At one time the Chinese communists were simply agrarian reformers because that is what communists are at a given stage. Indeed, they still are agrarian reformers, and very ruthless ones, too. The story of communist victory in China does illustrate the fact that when communists are in opposition they act like liberals. They fought on a united front with Chiang Kai Shek against Japan; their whole

emphasis was on freedom, democracy, co-operation with Western allies, and with the Christian Church. In 1946 while the communists were still a minority party, their leaders sent an invitation to the *Chung Hua Sheng Kung Hui* (Chinese Church) to send missionaries to the communist areas. When the students in Shanghai were demonstrating against the Nationalist Government, the appeal was to freedom of speech, and there were protests against the mysterious disappearances of leftist university professors. But when the communists took control, they promised freedom of speech and religion, and yet it was not long before other professors were disappearing from college campuses, and the Churches, although not subject to direct persecution, were very hard pressed, and most of their leaders had to conform very closely to the government line of policy.

MEMBER. Do you think the Chinese Christians are strong enough in faith and numbers to meet the communist challenge?

SPEAKER. Yes, I think we must trust them for that, provided we don't insist that true Christian discipleship necessarily implies approval of the American way of life, or even democracy. St. Francis, for example, had never heard of either, and he probably had very erroneous ideas about government and the nature of the universe, but he was a good Christian! Living in a communist society is in some ways like returning to the Dark Ages; much of your horizon is blacked out, and you begin to forget the world outside your own government loud speaker. Yet it is still possible to be a faithful Christian, though it is exceedingly hard. The Chinese Church has a sense of being on its own, and there is a certain exhilaration about this.

There will undoubtedly be mistakes, even apostasy, but generally, we must trust that the Holy Spirit which has been bestowed upon the Chinese bishops and clergy will guide them through this most difficult time.

MEMBER. Should we say that the Christian missionary effort in China has not been strong enough to stop the advance of communism?

SPEAKER. Again, I don't think that is the right way to put the question. Christian missions in China started before there was communism to stop, and never had such a merely negative purpose. You can say instead that Christian missions in China were too weak and ill-supported to convert China to Christ. But the same, alas, is also true of missions in India, Brazil, Africa, or Manhattan. The Church has not been strong enough to forestall a quite vigorous paganism in all these places.

MEMBER. Yes, I can see that. I suppose we could not expect the Church in China to have done more in the hundred and fifty years or so of its modern history than the Church in Eastern Europe has accomplished in a thousand.

Communism and the Church in Eastern Europe

SPEAKER. Yes, and we must always remember that the Church does not try to win its victories by war and violent revolution. The Christian revolution is slower but more thorough. But I do not think we need to be too gloomy about the Church even in the part of Europe that is communist-controlled. On the face of it the position is disastrous, and young people in East Germany are being fed on a gospel of hate and distortion. Yet, we know that there are in that part

of Europe some of the finest Christian leaders to be found anywhere, men like Bishop Dibelius, and the Church in West Germany, which has had a remarkable spiritual resurgence since World War II, has kept in close touch with its brethren in the East. There is evidence that the Church in East Germany and Czechoslovakia is very much alive. Once again it is proving true as it proved in two world wars, that neither wars nor iron curtains can really separate us from the love of Christ.

MEMBER. You are right. I think the witness of the Church behind the curtain helps us to remember that the people over there are human beings, people who are not free to make the kind of decisions we can make, but people whose decisions and response to communism are much more costly than ours.

It seems to me the tension is so terrific in those countries that to live there must be like living in the time of religious wars. Many people are now talking about communism as a kind of religion. What do you think about that?

Is Communism a Religion?

SPEAKER. Yes, that subject is being discussed widely, for instance in *Communism and Christ* by the Rev. Charles W. Lowry, Jr. At first sight it seems impossible. The communists themselves, of course, would never agree to such a description of their beliefs. Communism is still certainly atheistic and hostile or indifferent to religion as it is generally understood. It is materialistic and man-centered. In this respect it is worth remembering that it sprang from the same roots as eighteenth and nineteenth century rationalism which

challenges Christianity in the capitalist West.* In other words, the pagan American and the pagan Russian have approximately the same reasons for not going to Church! Finally, the communist is completely unscrupulous about the means he uses to achieve his ends.

MEMBER. Well, if it is a religion without God, without spirit, and without moral obligations, it certainly ought not to be confused with Christianity, so how does communism come to be called a religion?

SPEAKER. In spite of its dissimilarity to the Christian religion, communism does have some rather strongly marked religious elements. For instance, communists have a keen sense of the inevitability of the course of history. They believe in the triumph of the proletariat with an intensity which appears to equal, if not surpass, the intensity of many Christians in their belief in the inevitable triumph of the Kingdom of God. It is because they are so sure of this belief that communists make an absolutely totalitarian demand upon

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* *Additional material which some groups may wish to use:*

During the eighteenth century, often known as the Age of Reason, philosophers were exalting the place of man in the universe and were often critical of traditional Christianity. Voltaire and Rousseau provided the rational influence in the French Revolution. Tom Paine, Franklin, and Jefferson, though less anti-religious, gave a similar man-centered emphasis to the American Revolution. In the nineteenth century this rationalism was re-enforced by scientific discoveries and industrial revolution on the one hand, and by the Romantic Movement which gave an added bitterness to the attack on religion; Marx is the heir of the German branch of this movement, and it can be seen that the *Communist Manifesto,* while claiming to be scientific, breathes all the romantic fire of the days of Garibaldi. It also must be recognized that there was a strongly Christian counterpart in both these movements; for instance, in the reasoned philosophy of Bishop Berkeley, or the more fervent evangelism of Wesley, and the romantic overtones of the Oxford Movement in the Church of England.

their adherents. Many ex-communists have testified to the quasi-religious experience of this total demand upon them. It is this complete loyalty to the cause which has brought forth the religious phenomenon of heroic sacrifice, the willingness of communist guerillas to suffer incredible hardships, the sinking of self in the interest of the collective, the ascetic simplicity of the worker's life, and the willingness to offer life wholeheartedly for the State.

Communism also presents a serious challenge to the Christian and to other religions through its missionary zeal. Like a religion it has a universal claim. The world is its parish and every member of the Party is committed to an unrelenting effort to spread the influence of communism by every possible means.

MEMBER. I wonder why it is that the communists so often make us feel uncomfortable and half ashamed of ourselves. Their sacrificial devotion sometimes makes the Church's efforts look half-hearted. They are so clever at pointing out the weaknesses of our own society. Does all this mean that we should think of communism as a kind of judgment of God?

Is Communism a Judgment of God?

SPEAKER. Yes, I think we have to admit that; though we have to make it quite clear that the communists, like the Assyrians who were regarded by Isaiah as the rod of God's anger (Isaiah 10:5-13), are also under the judgment of God and that their crimes cannot be ignored. Marx's theory of the economic determination of history gave him a weapon with which to prove men's motives and often to show them up as less elevated than they imagined, and this sometimes serves a prophetic purpose. At the same time, I think we

Christians should be alive to the fact that Marx's genius for revolutionary invective and hate propaganda has been followed faithfully down the communist line; it is not always a genuinely righteous anger. Communists have indeed exploited this technique of bitter denunciation until it has become almost ridiculous. The trouble is that some persons without a sense of humor cannot see through all this heated verbiage, and consequently lose their tempers in turn, which is just what the communists want.

MEMBER. What then do you think are the judgments of God that are shown up by the fact of communism?

SPEAKER. First of all, it has shown up the failure of the Western World to solve the problems of industrialism and war. The communist solution is no better, but it has shown that Western society is a sick society. It has pointed out forcibly what Christians have always known but often ignored.

Secondly, Marxism has shown up the selfishness of the old bourgeois cut-throat capitalism of the nineteenth century. As Archbishop Temple remarked, "Karl Marx was not far wrong in his famous declaration that *the bourgeoisie whenever it got the upper hand put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations, pitilessly tore asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his natural superiors, and left no other bond between man and man than naked self-interest and callous cash payment.*"

Thirdly, the energy and devotion of many young communists stands in judgment on our Western life, much of which is futile and pointless. Many young Chinese felt that the westernized port cities like

Shanghai or Hong Kong with their movies, night clubs, and appeals to enjoyment had nothing to offer in comparison with the sterner but more purposeful task of rebuilding their country in the interior.

Finally, we may say that communism stands in judgment on the Church which has so often in its history ranged itself on the side of privilege and has allowed its vested interests to stand in the way of clear proclamation of the Gospel of God who is no respecter of persons. Communism brings home to us our failure and reminds us of what we should already know, that the Church is also tainted with sin and that *there is no health in us.*

MEMBER. I suppose you might say that the Marxist is like a quack doctor with a flair for diagnosis, but that his remedy is really worse than the disease.

SPEAKER. Yes, I think that is so. Christians believe that the communist diagnosis does not really go deep enough. The sickness of society is basically due not to human inefficiency but to human sin, and society, both in the communist East and capitalist West, needs a change of outlook and heart which can only come from a widespread turning to God.

What Can Christians Learn from Communism?

MEMBER. What do you think Christians can learn from the communist challenge?

SPEAKER. First of all, we must be ready to listen to the voices of God's prophets who from age to age have spoken out against public and private unrighteousness, but have also gone on to speak of redemption. Communists talk about injustice and the need

for self-criticism. They demand confessions which are supposedly free; but, as we have seen, the Christian teaching is that repentance must be genuine, and confession, which is to God and not to man, is followed by forgiveness. We are challenged to rediscover the true meaning of self-examination, repentance, confession, and forgiveness. As Christians we must learn what social repentance means in our Western World.

Secondly, we should understand the Christian roots of democracy. This is not to say that Christianity and democracy are identical, for there are countries where the Church bears witness in which parliamentary democracy is far from practical. But generally speaking, the democratic principle of fair government and justice for all is close to the precepts of Christ, and it is right that we should look to some such form of government as a norm.

Thirdly, we can understand from the international activities of communism the immense importance of the worldwide Church, that greatest single fact of our time. There is an urgency that its missionary work, for instance in the Philippines or Africa, be carried on with foresight and imagination. The worldwide Church is not set up as a rival to the Cominform, for it is bigger and more widespread, not confined behind iron curtains. But we are challenged by the energy and zeal of the communist missionaries to go forward with the renewing power of the Holy Spirit to carry out our own missionary task.

It is, however, important to remember that what is wanted is not only improved techniques, for the Church's weapon is not its size or efficiency, but what it has to say, and its message for these times is surely this: that though man's fears of communism are often

quite real and justified, yet they can be overcome by a faith in the Living God.

MEMBER. Now I want to ask two questions about how Christians can actually face communism in action, and, indeed, how they can influence communists. The first is: *How should Christians act in a country where communists are in power?* The second is: *How should we act in the United States today?*

SPEAKER. I am glad you asked the questions that way. For we sometimes seem so scared of communism that we cannot imagine that Christianity can be more persuasive; and yet it is true that in many parts of the world people are becoming disillusioned with communism. A number of these ex-communists have rediscovered their faith in Christ, or found it for the first time. At the same time we should not have any illusions about the difficulties of winning such converts. Would your parish know how to deal with an ex-communist convert, if it had him? But let us take your first question first, and imagine the Church in a country where communism is coming to power. There is a fairly well-defined pattern of communist development; the first stage is co-operation, the second is infiltration, and the third is control.

MEMBER. Would you say then that an acute Christian would realize from the start that a united front activity was tainted with communism, and that he should have nothing to do with it?

SPEAKER. I think that would condemn us all for having joined a wartime alliance with Russia. It would also lead us to abandon the United Nations. There are limited objectives on which we and the communists can get together without any mutual illusions.

Missionaries in China deliberately stayed there as long as they could in hopes that by showing a Christian attitude they could prove by deeds the quiet but determined faith of the Church, *So that in case they speak against you as wrongdoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God* (I Peter 2:12). When it became clear that co-operation was being succeeded by infiltration and the seizure of power, the missionaries were ready to leave; but the Chinese Christians could not leave. They were fellow-travellers, whether they liked it or not, and the same is true of Christians in Eastern Europe.

MEMBER. What do you think is the greatest spiritual hardship for Christians in such a place?

SPEAKER. I think the greatest hardship to bear is the communist spreading of mistrust and fear. When you do not know who are your friends, and who is spying on you, when you are constantly under the threat of house arrest, personal search, or unlimited detention, it is very hard to keep the sense of trust in God which is so much needed in those circumstances.

Another great difficulty is the well-known fact that communists do not feel bound to tell the truth, nor do they subscribe to any moral code, only the iron discipline of the Party. It is thus fatally easy for a Christian to accept the assurances of the communists, only to awake too late to find that he has sold his birthright for a temporary and illusory advantage.

MEMBER. Do you think that communism could have been averted in China and Eastern Europe, if Christians as a whole had acted more wisely?

SPEAKER. You cannot tell. There was probably a revolutionary situation in some of those countries to

start with. But I think the Church is always right to try to do what it can. For there is no inner necessity for communist aggression to win every time. There have been cases, for instance in Greece and Finland, in which it has tried and failed. It is always worth trying to spread the Christian faith as long as you can. Remember that you cannot take the public pronouncements of Christian leaders in communist countries as a yardstick for measuring the growth or health of a Church. We know that God measures our spiritual progress by a different kind of gauge.

MEMBER. Some of the statements made by Christians in communist areas certainly sound strange to us. They do not seem to see the dangers you have mentioned. Do you think that Christians can really hold diametrically opposite views from each other on political and economic questions?

SPEAKER. It is quite a dilemma. If you say *Yes,* there is a danger of your meaning that your political and social views are completely separate from your religious faith, that is to say that religious convictions are irrelevant in these matters. On the other hand, if you say roundly that a person is not really a Christian if he does not believe in the democratic way of life, you are imposing a political and ideological test for his orthodoxy.

MEMBER. Now let us think of the question which often figures in the headlines: *How can a sincere Christian deal with problem of communism in the United States?*

SPEAKER. I would begin the answer to this question by asking you one. Do you agree that nobody expects the United States to turn communist either by constitutional means or by violent revolution in the foreseeable future?

MEMBER. I think we should agree to that. But are not the communists trying to sow seeds of fear and dissension in a great many phases of our community life?

SPEAKER. Yes, and I think we must admit that they have partly succeeded. But we must go on to say that Christians have a special remedy for fear, *Perfect love casteth out fear,* and a clear-sighted love of our neighbor, whoever he is, will save us from a great deal of unreasoning fear. That is of prime importance.

Secondly, we are less likely to be afraid of a thing, if we understand it. Christians should therefore know something of strategy and tactics. As we have noted, communists use liberal slogans when in opposition, and then twist words to a new meaning when they come to power. Words like *democracy, peace,* and *freedom* take on new and strange connotations. But it is important for Christians in the United States to recognize that liberal principles themselves are not invalidated just because the communists try to cash in on them. Peace is still peace, one of the fruits of the Spirit, even though we may be profoundly distrustful of Picasso's dove.

MEMBER. I would like to ask at this point: Are not the activities of communists in this country part of a master plan for Russian world domination, rather than a following of Marxist theory?

SPEAKER. I think there is a great need for vigilance among thoughtful Christians on this matter. We have to remember that there are forces of corruption and original sin in a communist society just as much as in a Christian or an American one. The greed for power can play havoc in every form of government. Russian communism, in addition, has become especially dangerous through its ruthless breaking not only of men's bodies, but of their minds and spirits. It bears today the marks of an unscrupulous drive for unlimited power, rather than those of an honest presentation of a compelling social panacea.

MEMBER. What do you think is the best way of making sure of the loyalty of people and organizations in responsible positions in the United States?

SPEAKER. I think Christians have some important experience on this whole loyalty question. Christians have discovered by long and painful roads that the only loyalty to Christ which is of value is that which comes from conviction and from the heart. Attempts have been made in the past, by means of the Inquisition for instance, to weed out by force or threats suggestions of false doctrine, heresy, or schism. But they have failed, because it is impossible to regiment a people's devotion either to their religion or to their nation. Any good general knows that the way to win the confidence of an army is not by the continual threat of court martial, but by a bold and inspiring leadership which instills the will to victory. In the same way the Christian's spiritual experience suggests that the way to call forth loyalty to the nation is by the quality and integrity of the people's elected rulers. There are undoubtedly communists and others who would like to undermine people's loyalty and to sow

confusion; there have to be some security checks in any non-communist nation. But it would be a bad day for the United States if the average man were assumed to be disloyal until he could prove to the contrary.

MEMBER. But wouldn't it be rather ostrich-like to ignore the communist threat to this country? Do you think that communists and communist-front members should be investigated and removed from offices in schools, universities, and even Churches?

SPEAKER. There is no question that Congress has the right to investigate anyone and everything, and there is an advantage in bringing to light what the communists are doing. But when it comes to penalizing men for their opinions, however detestable, I think we have to be very careful. The ordinary laws of the land can take care of grave crimes against the nation, such as treason or plotting to overthrow the Constitution. We also are protected to some extent against the dissemination of literature which is blasphemous or obscene or a direct incentive to crime. But it is still a cherished tradition, and a Christian one, that there should be freedom of thought and discussion in the universities and the Church and that these bodies should themselves be trusted to uphold the truth as they see it.

MEMBER. Do you think then that too much regulation of thought is a sign of fear?

SPEAKER. Exactly, and what is more, it misses its mark, for the communists at which it aims promptly turn into liberal martyrs, complaining bitterly about the loss of freedom, and all this is grist to their mill. The communists in power are usually clever enough not to make martyrs of Christians. It is equally unwise

for Christian rulers to make martyrs of communists.

What is needed is a more positive faith, not so much in American institutions themselves, for divorced from their Christian origins their praise becomes somewhat meaningless, but in the faith of our fathers who produced them. We can find a deeper faith in the Christian way of life which has led to the good things of the American heritage; and in this way we can overcome fears and hold out to the world a hope that is based not on material benefits, nor upon the crushing of our opponents, but on our knowledge of God's calling to us through the Church. The North American continent is still a bastion of hope for many people who have less freedom than we do; but without the savor of Christian faith, it could become a bastion hedged about with barriers, forbidding to those who would taste of its treasure, unwilling to exchange goods or ideas with the outside world. The alternatives to Christianity for such a people are likely to be ignorance, arrogance, and isolation, which all make it vulnerable to communism and other forms of totalitarian agression.

MEMBER. We have covered a wide field in our discussion, and it is time to draw to a conclusion. Would you kindly give us a short summary of our argument, and suggest to us where it is leading?

SPEAKER. I will try. We saw first how Marx got his ideas and what they were. As Christians we will reject some of them, his atheism and belief in violence, and the lack of freedom implicit in his thought. But some of his ideas, based on observation of economic patterns, should be understood, for they describe things that happen or did happen to our fellow creatures.

We have seen how communism appeals to young

people. The Christian faith is the other great cause in the world which shows a perennial power of appealing to the loyalty of young men and women. That is why the youth work of the Church is of such vital importance. Young people today are in all kinds of doubts and difficulties. They need the faith that the Church can give, and many of them are finding it.

The Church is also giving a lead in social relations, but the subject we have discussed is a challenge, for the voice of the Christian still needs to be heard more clearly in the factory and the local trade union and on the farm. The Christian Social Relations Department of our Church is concerned with all these things, but we must remember that the Church works as leaven and not with the outward power of a highly organized State.

We have seen how the communists are apparently able to ignore the barriers of race and color. The Church must implement its beliefs in racial equality. It bears witness already to a worldwide fellowship in which the barriers of race and color increasingly are being broken down; but there are areas where this is not the case and Christians must press on until an unbroken brotherhood is achieved.

We have noticed how Marxism developed in the nineteenth century until the Russian Revolution took place early in the twentieth; and at the same time we saw how Christian influences have been at work in the same period. We have noticed the witness and the suffering of the Church in Russia, and then we went on to look at what has happened in China and how the Church reacted there. Then we saw how the spread of communism in Eastern Europe has brought forth a courageous response from Christians there. Indeed we may go on to say that the Church within the com-

munist curtain is now also much more widespread and diversified than before; communist rulers now have to deal not only with Russian Christians but with Chinese and Czechs, East Germans and Bulgarians, who all have their own living church traditions.

Then we went on to see how far communism is a religion, and how far it is a judgment of God. It has many of the dynamic qualities of a religion, though without any deep spiritual experience. It may be regarded as a judgment on our blindness in failing to understand or remedy the ills of society; in particular the Church may regard it as a judgment on its own failure to read the signs of the times in the early days of industrial revolution. At the same time it was clear to us that communism is also under God's judgment for its ruthlessness and cynicism in its methods of carrying out its program.

Communism undoubtedly presents the world with a tremendous challenge. Our answer to it as Christians is perhaps threefold:

1. In home affairs see that your church and community are taking a lead in placing before legislators all possible ways of improving conditions of work and living, without respect of persons.

2. See that your parish and community stand wholeheartedly behind the United Nations, and that the UN is upheld by prayer and Christian interest.

3. See that your church is giving its full quota to the General Church Program for our Church's overseas work should be strengthened at every point. This we have seen is much more than an answer to communism; it is part of the commission which has been binding on all Christians since Christ's charge to His disciples on the Mount of the Ascension.

MEMBER. Isn't that program a little bit vague? Could you make it more definite?

SPEAKER. It will become more definite if you decide to do something about it. There are so many ways in which we fail to take advantage of our heritage of freedom. But if we are to preserve it, people like you must express themselves and do things. Write to your senator, plan a visit of your group to the United Nations, if possible; study the missionary work of the Church, send supplies to different needy missions. There is a lot that you can do, and it is all worthwhile, for as our Lord said, *Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.*

Finally, we have outlined how Christians do and can act in a society where communism is a powerful candidate for office, and we have posed the question how American Christians should act in face of communist activity in this country, and we have suggested the need for an emphasis on the positive heritage of America and its Christian roots, rather than the intensely suspicious attitude which seems to betray fear.

Christians should undoubtedly be as wise as serpents and harmless as doves; we should not underestimate the dangers to the free world at home and abroad. But as members of a worldwide classless society, the Church, which has in the past turned the world upside down, so many times, we may face all dangers ahead with the confidence that our Lord meant what He said when He promised His followers, *In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.*

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Gift - Mrs. Sherman (J) (254)

For Further Reading

Communism and Christ by Charles W. Lowry (New York, Morehouse. 1952. $2.50). The relevance of Christ to the contemporary crisis.

Christianity and Communism by John C. Bennett (New York, Association. 1948. $1.50). An analysis of the schism in civilization from the Christian viewpoint.

The Theory and Practice of Communism by R. N. Carew Hunt (New York, Macmillan. 1951. $3.50). The best comprehensive survey of the subject.

A Christian Witness in Communist China by Barnabas, a pseudonym (New York, Morehouse-Gorham, 1951. 85 cents).

The Irony of American History by Reinhold Niebuhr (New York, Scribners, 1952. $2.50). The problem of human evil in history.

A Christian's Handbook on Communism. Edited by Charles W. Forman (New York, National Council of Churches. 1952. 35 cents). Communism and its meanings are presented by a group of Christian workers from Latin America.

Let's Join the Human Race by Stringfellow Barr (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1950. 25 cents). A constructive plan is proposed for the alleviation of the world's ills.

The God That Failed edited by Richard Crossman (New York, Harper, 1950. $3.50). The stories of six disillusioned ex-communists.

World Communism Today by Martin Ebon (New York, Whittlesey House, 1948. $6.00). Fear and want are communism's ideal climate, and democracy is its cure.